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ABSTRACT

In establishing appropriate social behaviors in mainstreamed severely handicapped students, it is important to understand the frustrations encountered in specific environments, the distinction between adaptive and appropriate behaviors, and the behaviors which may serve as transitions to more adaptive behaviors (such as communication of ideas). A control-investment model is explained, and the distinction between appropriate (behaviors which produce no conflict with a particular environment) and adaptive (behaviors which facilitate an individual achieving skills) behaviors is made. An assessment model is described which involves evaluation of environmentally relevant priority behaviors, thorough evaluation of the individual, evaluation of how to pair normal peers with severely handicapped individuals, and evaluation of social skills. Response considerations (including response immediacy) and curriculum considerations (including level of independence required) are pointed out. (SW)

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Curriculum and Instructional Strategies for Developing Interpersonal Interactions with Severely Handicapped Students: Application in Integrated Settings

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Issues

Control and investment. Howell and Kaplan (1980) have presented a "control-investment" model for understanding social interactions. Although they have focused upon mildly handicapped students, their model can also be effectively utilized as a starting point for analyzing social skills of seriously handicapped students.

Essentially Howell and Kaplan have emphasized the relevancy of an individual's behavior in terms of the frustration the person encounters in specific environments. Their theory examines options for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors through a cognitive behavioral approach (Meichenbaum, 1977; such an approach involves hypothesizing why an individual behaves in a particular way and then proceeding to validate that hypothesis through further observations). If an individual perceives that he/she has little control or has little investment in outcomes of his/her behaviors then it is theorized that inappropriate behaviors will often times result. For example, if a child is presented with "oatmeal" for breakfast and the child dislikes oatmeal, several options are usually available. The child could: 1) eat it anyway, 2) complain (verbally stating the problem), or 3) indicate dissatisfaction through a nonverbal means (such as throwing

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the oatmeal across the room, pushing it aside, or leaving it uneaten. If the child is nonverbal, a fourth course of action is frequently displayed: whining, crying or screaming. Howell and Kaplan suggest that if inappropriate behaviors are observed that the appropriate behavioral alternatives should be defined and advantages and disadvantage of each option determined.

If the child is acting inappropriately due to an investment issue, then procedures for increasing the child's investment can be identified through dialogue with the child or through restructuring the situation so that the child's involvement or dependence upon appropriate behaviors is greater. For the child who dislikes shcool the teacher may explain the advantages of school or the teacher may provide more opportunities for the individual to engage in high interest activities which are reinforcing to the student.

With severely handicapped students the use of contingent reinforcers which are given immediately and frequently can be effective in increasing the individual's investment in the desired behavior. Greater control for the individual can be established by pinpointing alternatives to the undesired behavior and using differential reinforcement of incompatible behaviors. Social skills can be improved through decreasing inappropriate behaviors and teaching alternative behaviors which are appropriate to particular situations.

Adaptive v. Appropriate Behaviors. When educators attempt to establish appropriate behaviors it may be useful for them to examine the short versus long term gains of various behavioral pinpoints. The distinction between adaptive and appropriate behaviors may be most critical when programming for long term goals rather than focusing only on the needs of the immediate environment. Although these two categories of behavior have many similar characteristics, behaviors which are situationally appropriate may at times

be directly contradictory to the behaviors needed to interact appropriately in future contexts (O'Connell-Mason and Behrmann, in press; Langone, 1981). For example, it may be totally appropriate for a severely handicapped individual to sit passively in a classroom, waiting for teacher direction for a specific task. It may be completely appropriate for the severely handicapped individual to respond only briefly to questions asked by others. In each of these cases it may be situationally inappropriate for the individual to: 1) locate and attempt to engage in high-interest activities, 2) complain about the activities presented or 3) attempt to carry on a lengthy conversation. In attempting to go beyond the requirements of the immediate environment the severely handicapped individual may display inappropriate behaviors as she/he attempts to practice new skills. He or she may: 1) appear to be off task, 2) utilize new equipment or materials that are high-interest, inappropriately, 3) complain about the situation by yelling or being noncompliant, or 4) interact inappropriately in attempting to carry on a conversation. However, if social skills are to be developed it may be quite important for the individual to practice new behaviors that will lead to more complex behaviors, behaviors that will be useful in future contexts such as leisure skill activities or freetime usage.

The distinction to be made between adaptive and appropriate behaviors is that those behaviors which obtain immediate reinforcement may be situationally appropriate and nonadaptive in the sense that they do not produce long term skills gains which will assist the individual in coping with future situations. In many instances disruptive behaviors may be extinguished without teaching alternative, appropriate behaviors. Appropriate

behaviors are hereined defined as:

> those observable behaviors which produce no conflict with the dictates of a particular environment.

Adaptive behaviors are defined to include:

> behaviors which facilitate an individual achieving skills needed in order for the individual to acquire coping skills and/or meet his/her individual needs, emotions or desires (or obtain the desired reinforcement.

Many adaptive behaviors facilitate communication between the individual and others in the environment. Some adaptive behaviors such as whining, crying or throwing oatmeal may be inappropriate and may be maladaptive from a short term perspective, particularly if those in the environment do need interpret the messages being conveyed and do not recognize the need need to teach socially acceptable alternatives. As Olley (1980) has stated:

> behavior disruptions such as tantrums, self injury, etc, may even be viewed as communicative when they serve, e.g., attention getting or escape functions (p. 24).

The adaptiveness of a behavior will depend upon the environmental reaction. Some behaviors may be adaptive in that they secure the immediate needs of the individual while being simultaneously maladaptive in that they create negative reactions and / or result in punishment. However even behaviors which result in punishment may be more adaptive than the situationally appropriate behaviors which are incompatible with the individual's needs or desires. In the oatmeal incident, continuing to eat oatmeal (which may be appropriate) will never facilitate the individual's communication of his/her desires. Therefore it may be advantageous to risk punishment or even undergo punishment

in order to establish an opportunity for the discontinuation of oatmeal.

In evaluating an individual's behavior it will be useful to pinpoint behaviors which may serve as transitions to more appropriate or adaptive behaviors. Figure 1 presents a system for such an analysis.

Insert Fig. 1 here

As portrayed in Figure 1 such transitions often involve the acquisition of a discrimination between acceptable and nonacceptable behaviors of the same response class rather than a rigid adherence to a rule which is designed to prevent specific behaviors. The programmers' problem becomes one of determining when to proceed from an old rule to another rule which is more difficult to comprehend since it involves a finer discrimination.

Sample interactional pinpoints which appear to be relevant for the development of basic social skills include the following: communication of the concepts more, less, stop, and continue; direction following (compliance); communication initiation; imitation; performing leisure skill activities; and initiating and sustaining leisure activities. These interactional pinpoints have been designated as particularly relevant due to their following characteristics:

1. Communication of ideas which can express level of interest, needs, wants or desires.
2. The necessity for compliance in many situations (work, home and community)
3. The necessity for communication skills that are not reliant upon others (with expressive reactional responding the need for someone else to ask questions or probe interests and desires may prevent

communication in instances in which the other person does not initiate the interaction; alternatives to crying, whining and misbehaving are needed).

4. The success of modeling and direct and indirect learning through repetitions of observed behaviors.

5. The development of skills to provide alternatives to inappropriate behaviors during noninstructured times.

6. The necessity for focused and prolonged attention in order to practice and participate in many tasks.

In comparison, common attributes of interactions by severely handicapped persons who have not received systematic programming in social skills include:

infrequent, inappropriate reactive responding rather than initiating behaviors; nonverbal; aggressive; and brief. Common interactional patterns may include lower level interactions such as whining, crying, hitting, hair pulling, and taking objects and food from others.

Other limiting conditions include: lack of ambulation, sensory deficits, and expressive problems. Often high rate, inappropriate behaviors such as self-stimming may also interfere with appropriate social interactions.

The Assessment Model

To facilitate interactional skill development with severely handicapped persons trainers should begin by evaluating environmentally relevant,

priority behaviors. Diagnosis must therefore start with assessment of: 1) current environments, 2) predicted future environments, 3) projected ideal environments, and 4) projected deteriorating environments. Within each of these contexts the following variables should be considered: environmental constaints; provisions for social interaction; staff- client ratios; normalization policies; privacy; materials, equipment and facilities; the possibilities for contingent reinforcement ; available teaching time;and access to community functions and services. The following educational questions must also be considered:

1. Where will handicapped individuals live and how?
2. What new regulatory policies will be in existence?
3. Will preferred practices be continued?
4. The immediate and long range usefulness of the skill.in predicted environments?
5. The possibilities for using the skill on a daily basis?
6. The amount of time needed to teach the skill?
7. The best possible peer match?
8. The possibilities for using prosthetic devices?
9. The possiblities for adapting equipment, methodology or materials?
10. The cost effectiveness of the current and projected environments?

In regards to social interaction skills , the questions concerning peer match, time available and opportunities for social interaction, normalization, privacy, and available reinforcers are critical . If reinforcers can be identified which provide opportunities for practicing social skills time can often be utilized to best advantage.Such activities as board games or ball games and circle games provide just such opportunities. As these environments are evaluated the practitioner should also be assessing possibiiities for adapting environments to better meet the needs of the individuals.

The second level of the proposed interactional model is to complete a thorough evaluation of the individual. In addition to traditional psychological, developmental and criterion referenced tests procedures such as those suggested by Thiagarajan, Semmel and Semmel (1974), i.e., learner analysis, are recommended. Important social attributes which should be evaluated include: prior training and experience, language style, attention span, sensory deficits, interfering social behaivors, individual interest, reinforcers and control-investment traits as outlined earlier in this paper.

The evaluation of the individual's interests could include an actual or hypothesized sociogram. Interests could be measured and observed by: 1. noting the individual's preferred activities (how an individual spends his/her time); 2. noting preferred foods; 3. establishing binary and tertiary choice conditions and noting the individual's response; and 4. observing the individual's responses to unusual or infrequent activities which are typically reinforcing such as field trips.

For individuals with limited communication skills, interests and preferred partners for interaction can be determined through trial and error experiments. In these experiments the severely handicapped individual would be paired with various other persons and the results noted.

The next evaluative step to lead to the development of social skills in integrated settings is to determine how to pair normal peers with severely handicapped individuals -- in other words to determine

the best utilization of the integrated interaction. This evaluation should include predictions concerning reinforcement needs, interests and skills of the nonhandicapped peers. One of the most effective strategies for obtaining this information is simply to ask the child with whom he/she would prefer to interact and which sorts of interactions he/she would prefer. Typically using live modeling, and film and videotaped demonstrations and discussions will facilitate decision making and interactional skill building for the nonhandicapped child (Donder and Nietupski, 1981). Presenting alternatives rather than using only open ended questions will also assist the peer in making these decisions.

The final evaluative step is to evaluate social skills through using checklists, criterion referenced tests, and published materials.

Once the evaluation has been completed then the trainer is in a better position to facilitate social interaction through the careful arrangement of antecedent and consequent events and through using modeling and shaping procedures.

Response considerations

In evaluating initial level and developing social skills it is useful to consider attributes of the responses demonstrated by the student. Response immediacy (latency), accuracy, intensity, topography (physical characteristics), rate and critical effects will be important variables to analyze in determining the adequacy of the individual's response to particular situations. Because a range of responses are usually appropriate in most situations, the rater's judgment must be utilized in determining both the appropriateness and adaptivity (from a long and short term perspective) of many social

responses. Nonverbal as well as verbal factors should be considered in determining a rating of a particular response. Such factors as body orientation, posture, eye contact, length of contact and facial features will provide relevant information about the performance of a certain skill.

Curriculum considerations

After examining response variables, environmental factors, and skill levels the evaluator should also review alternative curricula before placing the individual into a particular program. The ideal is to find a good curriculum-learner match. Such factors as age-appropriateness, terminal skill utility, level of independence required, and task difficulty (Gaylord-Ross, 1980) should be evaluated along with such curriculum components as opportunity for drill and practice, task sequencing, and provisions for generalization and adaptation. Educators need to examine more carefully the terminal goals -- these goals should be stated in terms of the indvidual's skill utilization in natural environments. Often it is best to program for practice of the terminal skill rather than an artificial skill that has been designed as a learning activity. Such programming will lead more automatically to generalization and adaptation.

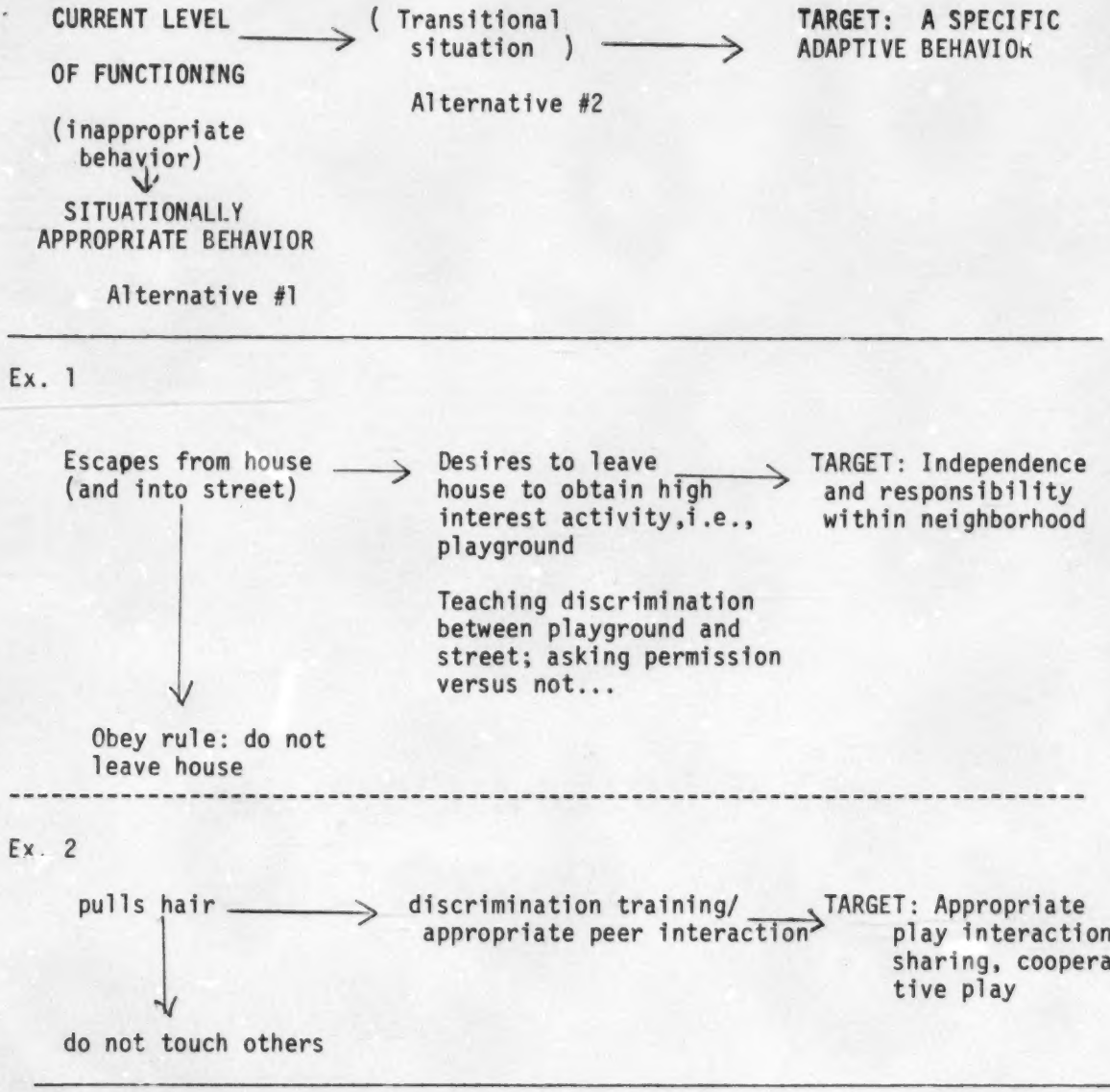
CURRENT LEVEL OF FUNCTIONING (inappropriate behavior)
(Transitional situation)
TARGET: A SPECIFIC ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR
Alternative #2
SITUATIONALLY APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR
Alternative #1
Ex. 1
Escapes from house (and into street)
Desires to leave house to obtain high interest activity, i.e., playground
TARGET: Independence and responsibility within neighborhood
Teaching discrimination between playground and street; asking permission versus not...
Obey rule: do not leave house
Ex. 2
pulls hair
discrimination training/ appropriate peer interaction
TARGET: Appropriate play interaction, sharing, cooperative play
do not touch others

Fig. 1 Relationship of currently inappropriate behavior to long term, adaptive behavior. Currently inappropriate behaviors may be modified to include either alternatives 1 or 2; to extinquish the inappropriate behavior through a restrictive provision or to build an alternative more appropriate (and possibly adaptive behavior).

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